

- How a professional umpire (or an acupuncturist, or some other professional) does his or her job
  - How an amplifier (or other stereo component) works
  - How an air conditioner (or other household appliance) works
  - How birds teach their young (or some other process in the natural world: how sharks feed, how a snake swallows an egg, how the human liver works)
  - How police control crowds
  - How people usually make up their minds when shopping for new cars (or new clothes)
3. Write a directive process analysis in which you use a light TONE. Although you need not take your subject in deadly earnest, your humor will probably be effective only if you take the method of process analysis seriously. Make clear each stage of the process and explain it in sufficient detail. Possible topics:
- How to get through the month of November (or March)
  - How to flunk out of college swiftly and efficiently
  - How to outwit a pinball machine
  - How to choose a mate
  - How to go broke
  - How to sell something that nobody wants

## DIVISION OR ANALYSIS

### Slicing into Parts



#### THE METHOD

A chemist working for a soft-drink company is asked to improve on a competitor's product, Orange Quench. (In Chap. 5, the same chemist was working on a different part of the same problem.) To do the job, the chemist first has to figure out what's in the drink. She smells the stuff and tastes it. Then she tests a sample chemically to discover the actual ingredients: water, corn syrup, citric acid, sodium benzoate, coloring. Methodically, the chemist has performed DIVISION OR ANALYSIS: She has separated the beverage into its components. Orange Quench stands revealed, understood, ready to be bettered.

Division or analysis (the terms are interchangeable) is a key skill in learning and in life. It is an instrument allowing you to slice a large and complicated subject into smaller parts that you can grasp and relate to one another. With analysis you comprehend—and communicate—the structure of things. And when it works, you find in the parts an idea or conclusion about the subject that makes it clearer, truer, more comprehensive, or more vivid than before you started.

If you have worked with the previous two chapters, you have already used division or analysis in explaining a process (Chap. 5) and in comparing and contrasting (Chap. 4). To make a better Orange Quench (a

process), the chemist might prepare a recipe that divides the process into separate steps or actions ("First, boil a gallon of water..."). When the batch was done, she might taste-test the two drinks, analyzing and then comparing their orange flavor, sweetness, and acidity. As you'll see in following chapters, too, division or analysis figures in all the other methods of developing ideas, for it is basic to any concerted thought, explanation, or evaluation.

### Kinds of Division or Analysis

Although division or analysis always works the same way—separating a whole, singular subject into its elements, slicing it into parts—the method can be more or less difficult depending on how unfamiliar, complex, and abstract the subject is. Obviously, it's going to be much easier to analyze a chicken (wings, legs, thighs...) than a poem by T. S. Eliot (this image, that allusion...), easier to analyze the structure of a small business than that of a multinational conglomerate. Just about any subject *can* be analyzed and will be the clearer for it. In "I Want a Wife," an essay in this chapter, Judy Brady divides the role of a wife into its various functions or services. In an essay called "Teacher" from his book *Pot Shots at Poetry* (1980), Robert Francis divides the knowledge of poetry he imparted to his class into six pie sections. The first slice is what he told his students that they knew already.

The second slice is what I told them that they could have found out just as well or better from books. What, for instance, is a sestina?

The third slice is what I told them that they refused to accept. I could see it on their faces, and later I saw the evidence in their writing.

The fourth slice is what I told them that they were willing to accept and may have thought they accepted but couldn't accept since they couldn't fully understand. This also I saw in their faces and in their work. Here, no doubt, I was mostly to blame.

The fifth slice is what I told them that they discounted as whimsy or something simply to fill up time. After all, I was being paid to talk.

The sixth slice is what I didn't tell them, for I didn't try to tell them all I knew. Deliberately I kept back something—a few professional secrets, a magic formula or two.

There are always multiple ways to divide or analyze a subject, just as there are many ways to slice a pie. Francis could have divided his knowledge of poetry into knowledge of rhyme, knowledge of meter, knowledge of imagery, and so forth—basically following the components of a poem. In other words, the outcome of an analysis depends on the rule or principle used to do the slicing. This fact accounts for some of the differences

among academic disciplines: A psychologist, say, may look at the individual person primarily as a bundle of drives and needs, whereas a sociologist may emphasize the individual's roles in society. Even within disciplines, different factions analyze differently, using different principles of division or analysis. Some psychologists are interested mainly in thought, others mainly in behavior; some psychologists focus mainly on emotional development, others mainly on moral development.

### Analysis and Critical Thinking

Analysis plays a fundamental role in CRITICAL THINKING, READING, and WRITING, topics discussed in this book's introduction (pp. 15–17). In fact, *analysis* and *criticism* are deeply related: The first comes from a Greek word meaning "to undo," the second from a Greek word meaning "to separate."

Critical thinking, reading, and writing go beneath the surface of the object, word, image, or whatever the subject is. When you work critically, you divide the subject into its elements, INFER the buried meanings and ASSUMPTIONS that define its essence, and SYNTHESIZE the parts into a new whole. Say a campaign brochure quotes a candidate as favoring "reasonable government expenditures on reasonable highway projects." The candidate will support new roads, right? Wrong. As a critical reader of the brochure, you quickly sense something fishy in the use (twice) of "reasonable." As an informed reader, you know (or find out) that the candidate has consistently opposed new roads, so the chances of her finding a highway project "reasonable" are slim. At the same time, her stand has been unpopular, so of course she wants to seem "reasonable" on the issue. Read critically, then, a campaign statement that seems to offer mild support for highways is actually a slippery evasion of any such commitment.

Analysis (a convenient term for the overlapping operations of analysis, inference, and synthesis) is very useful for exposing such evasiveness, but that isn't its only function. It may also help you understand a short story, perceive the importance of a sociological case study, or form a response to an environmental impact report.

If you've read this far in this book, you've already done quite a bit of analytical/critical thinking as you've read and analyzed the essays. In this chapter, three of the essays themselves—by Armin A. Brott, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Emily Prager—show critical thinking about artifacts of popular culture.

## THE PROCESS

### Subjects and Theses

Keep an eye out for writing assignments requiring division or analysis—in college and work, they won't be few or hard to find. They will probably include the word *analyze* or a word implying analysis such as *evaluate*, *examine*, *interpret*, *discuss*, or *criticize*. Any time you spot such a term, you know your job is to separate the subject into its elements, to infer their meanings, to explore the relations among them, and to draw a conclusion about the subject.

Almost any coherent entity—object, person, place, concept—is a fit subject for analysis if the analysis will add to the subject's meaning or significance. Little is deadlier than the rote analytical exercise that leaves the parts neatly dissected and the subject comatose on the page. As a writer, you have to animate the subject, and that means finding your interest. What about your subject seems curious? What's appealing? or mysterious? or awful? And what will be your PURPOSE in writing about the subject: Do you simply want to explain it, or do you want to argue for or against it?

Such questions can help you find the principle or framework you will use to divide the subject into parts. (As we mentioned before, there's more than one way to slice most subjects.) Say you're contemplating a hunk of bronze in the park. Why do you like the sculpture, or why don't you? What elements of its creation and physical form make it art? What is the point of such public art? What does this sculpture do to this park, or vice versa? Any of these questions could suggest a slant on the subject, a framework for analysis, and a purpose for writing, getting your analysis moving.

Finding your principle of analysis will lead you to your essay's THESIS as well—the main point you want to make about your subject. Expressed in a THESIS SENTENCE, this idea will help keep you focused and help your readers see your subject as a whole rather than a bundle of parts. Your essay on the bronze in the park, for instance, might have one of these thesis sentences:

Though it may not be obvious at first, this bronze sculpture represents the city dweller's relationship with nature.

Like much public art today, this bronze sculpture seems chiefly intended to make people ignore it.

The huge bronze sculpture in the middle of McBean Park demonstrates that so-called public art does little for the public interest.

After any of these thesis sentences, you would go on to identify and explain the relevant elements of the sculpture: in the first case, maybe the

sculpture's hints of plants and water and connection; in the second case, maybe the sculpture's blandness, lack of a clear message, and lack of artistic rigor; in the third case, maybe the sculpture's cost, uselessness, and ugliness. (Notice that each approach reveals something different in the sculpture, with very different results.)

In developing an essay by analysis, having an outline at your elbow can be a help. You don't want to overlook any parts or elements that should be included in your framework. (You needn't mention every feature in your final essay or give them all equal treatment, but any omissions or variations should be conscious.) And you want to use your framework consistently, not switching carelessly (and confusingly) from, say, the form of the sculpture to the cost of public art. In writing her brief essay "I Want a Wife," Judy Brady must have needed an outline to work out carefully the different activities of a wife, so that she covered them all and clearly distinguished them.

### Evidence

Making a valid analysis is chiefly a matter of giving your subject thought, but for the result to seem useful and convincing to your readers, it will have to refer to the concrete world. The method requires not only cogitation, but open eyes and a willingness to provide EVIDENCE. The nature of the evidence will depend entirely on what you are analyzing—physical details for a sculpture, quotations for a poem, financial data for a business case study, statistics for a psychology case study, and so forth. The idea is to supply enough evidence to justify and support your particular slant on the subject.

A final caution: It's possible to get carried away with one's own analysis, to become so enamored of the details that the subject itself becomes dim or distorted. You can avoid this danger by keeping the subject literally in front of you as you work (or at least imagining it vividly) and by maintaining an outline. It often helps to reassemble your subject at the end of the essay: That gives you a chance to place your subject in a larger context, speculate on its influence, or affirm its significance. By the end of the essay, your subject must be a coherent whole truly represented by your analysis, not twisted, diminished, inflated, or obliterated. The reader should be intrigued by your subject, yes, but also able to recognize it on the street.

### CHECKLIST FOR REVISING A DIVISION OR ANALYSIS

- ✓ **PRINCIPLE OF ANALYSIS.** What is your particular slant on your subject, the rule or principle you have used to divide your subject into its elements? Where do you tell readers what it is?
- ✓ **COMPLETENESS.** Have you considered all the subject's elements required by your principle of analysis?
- ✓ **CONSISTENCY.** Have you applied your principle of analysis consistently, viewing your subject from a definite slant?
- ✓ **EVIDENCE.** Is your division or analysis well supported with concrete details, quotations, data, or statistics, as appropriate?
- ✓ **SIGNIFICANCE.** Why should readers care about your analysis? Have you told them something about your subject that wasn't obvious on its surface?
- ✓ **TRUTH TO SUBJECT.** Is your analysis faithful to the subject, not distorted, exaggerated, deflated?

### DIVISION OR ANALYSIS IN A PARAGRAPH: TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

#### Using Division or Analysis to Write About Television

The following paragraph analyzes the components of a television laugh track, the recorded chorus that tells us when a comedy is funny. Though written especially for *The Brief Bedford Reader*, not as part of an essay, this brief analysis could itself be one component in an examination of TV comedy. Or, with the related paragraph on page 255–56, illustrating CLASSIFICATION, it could contribute to an essay on, say, how the producers of TV comedies manipulate viewers.

Most television comedies, even some that boast live audiences, rely on the laugh machine to fill too-quiet moments on the soundtrack. The effect of a canned laugh comes from its four overlapping elements. The first is style, from titter to belly laugh. The second is intensity, the volume, ranging from mild to medium to earsplitting. The third ingredient is duration, the length of the laugh, whether quick, medium, or extended. And finally, there's the number of laughers, from a lone giggler to a roaring throng. According to rumor (for its exact workings are a secret), the machine contains a bank of thirty-two tapes. Furiously working keys and tromping pedals, the operator plays the tapes singly or in combination to blend the four ingredients, as a maestro weaves a symphony out of brass, woodwinds, percussion, and strings.

*Principle of analysis:  
elements creating the  
effect of a canned laugh*

1. Style
2. Intensity
3. Duration
4. Number

*Details and examples  
clarify elements*

### Using Division or Analysis in an Academic Discipline

The next paragraph appeared first in a scholarly journal and then in a textbook on medical ethics. The author discusses four possible models for the doctor-patient relationship, ending with the one detailed below. The careful analysis supports his preference for this model over the others.

The model of social relationship which fits these conditions [of realistic equality between patient and doctor] is that of the contract or covenant. The notion of contract should not be loaded with legalistic implications, but taken in its more symbolic form as in the traditional religious or marriage "contract" or "covenant." Here two individuals or groups are interacting in a way where there are obligations and expected benefits for both parties. The obligations and benefits are limited in scope, though, even if they are expressed in somewhat vague terms. The basic norms of freedom, dignity, truth-telling, promise-keeping, and justice are essential to a contractual relationship. The premise is trust and confidence even though it is recognized that there is not a full mutuality of interests. Social sanctions institutionalize and stand behind the relationship, in case there is a violation of the contract, but for the most part the assumption is that there will be a faithful fulfillment of the obligations.

—Robert M. Veatch,

"Models for Medicine in a Revolutionary Age"

*Principle of analysis:  
elements of a contract  
between doctor and  
patient*

1. Obligations and benefits for both parties
2. Obligations and benefits limited
3. Freedom, dignity, and other norms
4. Trust and confidence
5. Support of social sanctions (meaning that society upholds the relationship)

### DIVISION OR ANALYSIS ELSEWHERE IN THE BRIEF BEDFORD READER

Division or analysis is so fundamental to thinking and writing that it might make more sense to list the essays where the method does not make a notable appearance. It underpins all the illustrations of comparison and contrast (Chap. 4), process analysis (Chap. 5), classification (Chap. 7), cause and effect (Chap. 8), and definition (Chap. 9). (These chapters' selections are not listed below.) In addition, the writers of the following essays make extensive use of the method.

#### PART ONE

Brad Manning, "Arm Wrestling with My Father"  
Itabari Njeri, "When Morpheus Held Him"  
Merrill Markoe, "Bob the Dog (1974–1998)"  
Barbara Lazear Ascher, "On Compassion"  
Anna Quindlen, "Homeless"  
Brent Staples, "Black Men and Public Space"

## CASE STUDY

### Using Division or Analysis

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During her sophomore year at Boston University, Cortney Keim applied for transfer to Pomona College in California. As part of its application, Pomona requested a statement about Keim, her academic goals, and her reasons for wanting to transfer.

Keim tried several approaches to her statement, struggling to present herself as serious and unique. In one draft, she followed the cue of Pomona's request—providing a brief autobiography, a list of goals, and an explanation for choosing Pomona—but that version seemed obvious and dull. In the end, Keim settled on the fresher approach you see here. She first divides herself into parts and then details each one, showing its relevance to Pomona.

#### Application Statement of Cortney Keim

In applying for transfer to Pomona, I seek to develop the three main components of myself: actor, student, and explorer.

Pomona's strong theater curriculum will give me the background I need to embark on a career in acting. As unstable a career as it may prove to be, acting is my fire. I have always liked entertaining others (in high school, I was voted class clown), even if it involves making a display of myself. As I have had the chance to act in varied plays over the last few years, I have also found that interpreting an author's text allows me paradoxically to express myself and to lose myself. And, yes, I have loved the appreciation of an audience, the sighs or laughs in the right places, the applause at the end.

Yet acting is not all. In high school and for two years at Boston University, I have also relished the liberal arts courses I've taken and the writing I've done in those courses. The courses have introduced me to worlds of information and ideas I wouldn't have known otherwise, and the writing has let me make up my own text, my own version of reality. Liberal arts courses are hard work, harder in many ways than acting, but the work pays off. Pomona's respected liberal arts curriculum will help me become the rounded, thoughtful, disciplined student I hope to be for the rest of my life.

It's also significant to me that Pomona is a small school in California, so different from the huge university I attend now and so far from the East Coast city where I have lived all my life. The explorer in me needs a new horizon. At Pomona I anticipate the opportunity to be more involved in

the activities of the college and to get to know a wider variety of people. In southern California, I expect to become familiar with a new climate, geography, and ecosystem.

Pomona promises to help me fulfill my needs to act, learn, and explore. In return, I promise to contribute whatever I can to the college and the larger community.

## JUDY BRADY

JUDY BRADY, born in 1937 in San Francisco, where she now lives, earned a BFA in painting from the University of Iowa in 1962. Drawn into political action by her work in the feminist movement, she went to Cuba in 1973, where she studied class relationships as a way of understanding change in a society. "I am not a 'writer,'" Brady declares, "but really am a disenfranchised (and fired) housewife, now secretary." Despite her disclaimer, Brady has published articles occasionally—on union organizing and education in Cuba, among other topics—and she writes a regular column for the Women's Cancer Resource Center. In 1991 she published *1 in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic*, an anthology of writings by women. Asked by an interviewer if she had won any awards lately, Brady responded, "People who do what I do don't get awards."

### *I Want a Wife*

"I Want a Wife" first appeared in the Spring 1972 issue of *Ms.* magazine and has been reprinted often. The essay is one of the best-known manifestos in popular feminist writing. In it, Brady trenchantly divides the work of a wife into its multiple duties and functions, leading to an inescapable conclusion. If you find that Brady stereotypes men, read the essay after hers, Armin A. Brott's "Not All Men Are Sly Foxes," for a different view.

I belong to that classification of people known as wives. I am A Wife. 1  
And, not altogether incidentally, I am a mother.

Not too long ago a male friend of mine appeared on the scene fresh from 2  
a recent divorce. He had one child, who is, of course, with his ex-wife. He is looking for another wife. As I thought about him while I was ironing one evening, it suddenly occurred to me that I, too, would like to have a wife. Why do I want a wife?

I would like to go back to school so that I can become economically inde- 3  
pendent, support myself, and, if need be, support those dependent upon me. I want a wife who will work and send me to school. And while I am going to school I want a wife to take care of my children. I want a wife to keep track of the children's doctor and dentist appointments. And to keep track of mine, too. I want a wife to make sure my children eat properly and are kept clean. I want a wife who will wash the children's clothes and keep them mended. I want a wife who is a good nurturant attendant to my children, who arranges for their schooling, makes sure that they have an adequate social life with their peers, takes them to the park, the zoo, etc. I want a wife who takes care of the children when they are sick, a wife who arranges to be around when the

children need special care, because, of course, I cannot miss classes at school. My wife must arrange to lose time at work and not lose the job. It may mean a small cut in my wife's income from time to time, but I guess I can tolerate that. Needless to say, my wife will arrange and pay for the care of the children while my wife is working.

I want a wife who will take care of my physical needs. I want a wife who 4  
will keep my house clean. A wife who will pick up after my children, a wife who will pick up after me. I want a wife who will keep my clothes clean, ironed, mended, replaced when need be, and who will see to it that my personal things are kept in their proper place so that I can find what I need the minute I need it. I want a wife who cooks the meals, a wife who is a good cook. I want a wife who will plan the menus, do the necessary grocery shopping, prepare the meals, serve them pleasantly, and then do the cleaning up while I do my studying. I want a wife who will care for me when I am sick and sympathize with my pain and loss of time from school. I want a wife to go along when our family takes vacation so that someone can continue to care for me and my children when I need a rest and change of scene.

I want a wife who will not bother me with rambling complaints about a 5  
wife's duties. But I want a wife who will listen to me when I feel the need to explain a rather difficult point I have come across in my course of studies. And I want a wife who will type my papers for me when I have written them.

I want a wife who will take care of the details of my social life. When my 6  
wife and I are invited out by my friends, I want a wife who will take care of the babysitting arrangements. When I meet people at school that I like and want to entertain, I want a wife who will have the house clean, will prepare a special meal, serve it to me and my friends, and not interrupt when I talk about things that interest me and my friends. I want a wife who will have arranged that the children are fed and ready for bed before my guests arrive so that the children do not bother us. I want a wife who takes care of the needs of my guests so that they feel comfortable, who makes sure that they have an ashtray, that they are passed the hors d'oeuvres, that they are offered a second helping of the food, that their wine glasses are replenished when necessary, that their coffee is served to them as they like it. And I want a wife who knows that sometimes I need a night out by myself.

I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs, a wife who makes love 7  
passionately and eagerly when I feel like it, a wife who makes sure that I am satisfied. And, of course, I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in the mood for it. I want a wife who assumes the complete responsibility for birth control, because I do not want more children. I want a wife who will remain sexually faithful to me so that I do not have to clutter up my intellectual life with jealousies. And I want a wife who understands that

my sexual needs may entail more than strict adherence to monogamy. I must, after all, be able to relate to people as fully as possible.

If, by chance, I find another person more suitable as a wife than the wife I already have, I want the liberty to replace my present wife with another one. Naturally, I will expect a fresh, new life; my wife will take the children and be solely responsible for them so that I am left free.

When I am through with school and have a job, I want my wife to quit working and remain at home so that my wife can more fully and completely take care of a wife's duties.

My God, who *wouldn't* want a wife?

### Journal Writing

Brady addresses the traditional obligations of a wife and mother. In your journal, jot down parallel obligations of a husband and father. (To take your journal writing further, see "From Journal to Essay" on the facing page.)

### Questions on Meaning

1. Sum up the duties of a wife as Brady sees them.
2. To what inequities in the roles traditionally assigned to men and to women does "I Want a Wife" call attention?
3. What is the **THESIS** of this essay? Is it stated or implied?
4. Is Brady unfair to men?

### Questions on Writing Strategy

1. What **EFFECT** does Brady obtain with the title "I Want a Wife"?
2. What do the first two paragraphs accomplish?
3. What is the **TONE** of this essay?
4. How do you explain the fact that Brady never uses the pronoun *she* to refer to a wife? Does this make her prose unnecessarily awkward?
5. What principle does Brady use to analyze the role of wife? Can you think of some other principle for analyzing the job?
6. Knowing that this essay was first published in *Ms.* magazine in 1972, what can you guess about its intended readers? Does "I Want a Wife" strike a college **AUDIENCE** today as revolutionary?
7. **OTHER METHODS.** Although she mainly divides or analyzes the role of wife, Brady also uses **CLASSIFICATION** to sort the many duties and responsibilities into manageable groups. What are the groups?

### Questions on Language

1. What is achieved by the author's frequent repetition of the phrase "I want a wife"?
2. Be sure you know how to define the following words as Brady uses them: nurturant (par. 3); replenished (6); adherence, monogamy (7).
3. In general, how would you describe the **DICTION** of this essay? How well does it suit the essay's intended audience?

### Suggestions for Writing

1. **FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY.** Working from your journal entry (previous page), write an essay titled "I Want a Husband" in which, using examples as Brady does, you enumerate the roles traditionally assigned to men in our society.
2. Imagining that you want to employ someone to do a specific job, divide the task into its duties and functions. Then, guided by your analysis, write an accurate job description in essay form.
3. **CRITICAL WRITING.** In an essay, **SUMMARIZE** Brady's view as you understand it and then **EVALUATE** her essay. Consider: Is Brady fair? (If not, is unfairness justified?) Is the essay relevant today? (If not, what has changed?) Provide specific **EVIDENCE** from your experience, observation, and reading.
4. **CONNECTIONS.** Both "I Want a Wife" and Armin A. Brott's "Not All Men Are Sly Foxes" (next page) challenge traditional ideas about how men and women are supposed to divide the labor in a marriage. However, Brady's **STYLE** is fast paced and her tone is sarcastic, while Brott is more methodical and earnest. Which method of addressing these issues do you find more effective? Why? Write an essay that **COMPARES AND CONTRASTS** the essays' tones, styles, **POINTS OF VIEW**, and **OBJECTIVE** versus **SUBJECTIVE** language. What conclusions can you draw about the connection between the writers' strategies and their messages?

## EMILY PRAGER

EMILY PRAGER was first published at age five when the *Houston Post* released her novel *Cinderella Goes to the Ball and Breaks Her Leg*. Born in 1952, she grew up in Houston, Asia, and New York City and graduated from Barnard College with a degree in anthropology. She wrote for *The National Lampoon Magazine*, cowrote and acted in the films *Mr. Mike's Mondo* and *Arena Brains*, and starred for four years in the soap opera *The Edge of Night*. Prager has written humor and social satire for numerous periodicals, collected in *In the Missionary Position* (1999), and she has published four books of fiction: *A Visit from the Footbinder and Other Stories* (1982), *Clea and Zeus Divorce* (1987), *Eve's Tattoo* (1991), and *Roger Fishbite: A Novel* (1999). Her most recent book, nonfiction, is *Wuhu Diary: On Taking My Adopted Daughter to Her Hometown in China* (2001).

### Our Barbies, Ourselves

The Barbie doll is just a harmless plaything for little girls, right? Prager suspected not, even when she was a child, and some recent information confirmed her hunch. Using division or analysis, she shows here how Barbie represents a twisted ideal of women. The essay first appeared in *Interview* magazine in 1991.

I read an astounding obituary in the *New York Times* not too long ago. It concerned the death of one Jack Ryan. A former husband of Zsa Zsa Gabor, it said, Mr. Ryan had been an inventor and designer during his lifetime. A man of eclectic creativity, he designed Sparrow and Hawk missiles when he worked for the Raytheon Company, and, the notice said, when he consulted for Mattel he designed Barbie.<sup>1</sup>

If Barbie was designed by a man, suddenly a lot of things made sense to me, things I'd wondered about for years. I used to look at Barbie and wonder, What's wrong with this picture? What kind of woman designed this doll? Let's be honest: Barbie looks like someone who got her start at the Playboy Mansion. She could be a regular guest on *The Howard Stern Show*. It is a fact of Barbie's design that her breasts are so out of proportion to the rest of her body that if she were a human woman, she'd fall flat on her face.

If it's true that a woman didn't design Barbie, you don't know how much saner that makes me feel. Of course, that doesn't ameliorate the damage.

<sup>1</sup> After Prager wrote this essay, Barbie's thirty-fifth birthday was the occasion for a "biography" asserting that Ryan did not design the doll from scratch but supervised its evolution from a sophisticated adult doll made in Germany.—EDS.

There are millions of women who are subliminally sure that a thirty-nine-inch bust and a twenty-three-inch waist are the epitome of lovability. Could this account for the popularity of breast implant surgery?

I don't mean to step on anyone's toes here. I loved my Barbie. Secretly, I still believe that neon pink and turquoise blue are the only colors in which to decorate a duplex condo. And like many others of my generation, I've never married, simply because I cannot find a man who looks as good in clam diggers as Ken.

The question that comes to mind is, of course, Did Mr. Ryan design Barbie as a weapon? Because it is odd that Barbie appeared about the same time in my consciousness as the feminist movement—a time when women sought equality and small breasts were king. Or is Barbie the dream date of weapons designers? Or perhaps it's simpler than that: Perhaps Barbie is Zsa Zsa if she were eleven inches tall. No matter what, my discovery of Jack Ryan confirms what I have always felt: There is something indescribably masculine about Barbie—dare I say it, phallic. For all her giant breasts and high-heeled feet, she lacks a certain softness. If you asked a little girl what kind of doll she wanted for Christmas, I just don't think she'd reply, "Please, Santa, I want a hard-body."

On the other hand, you could say that Barbie, in feminist terms, is definitely her own person. With her condos and fashion plazas and pools and beauty salons, she is definitely a liberated woman, a gal on the move. And she has always been sexual, even totemic. Before Barbie, American dolls were flat-footed and breastless, and ineffably dignified. They were created in the image of little girls or babies. Madame Alexander was the queen of doll makers in the '50s, and her dollies looked like Elizabeth Taylor in *National Velvet*. They represented the kind of girls who looked perfect in jodhpurs, whose hair was never out of place, who grew up to be Jackie Kennedy—before she married Onassis. Her dolls' boyfriends were figments of the imagination, figments with large portfolios and three-piece suits and presidential aspirations, figments who could keep dolly in the style to which little girls of the '50s were programmed to become accustomed, a style that spasmed with the '60s and the appearance of Barbie. And perhaps what accounts for Barbie's vast popularity is that she was also a '60s woman: into free love and fun colors, anti-class, and possessed of a real, molded boyfriend, Ken, with whom she could chant a mantra.

But there were problems with Ken. I always felt weird about him. He had no genitals, and, even at age ten, I found that ominous. I mean, here was Barbie with these humongous breasts, and that was OK with the toy company. And then, there was Ken with that truncated, unidentifiable lump at his groin. I sensed injustice at work. Why, I wondered, was Barbie designed with



such obvious sexual equipment and Ken not? Why was his treated as if it were more mysterious than hers? Did the fact that it was treated as such indicate that somehow his equipment, his essential maleness, was considered more powerful than hers, more worthy of the dignity of concealment? And if the issue in the mind of the toy company was obscenity and its possible damage to children, I still object. How do they think I felt, knowing that no matter how many water beds they slept in, or hot tubs they romped in, or swimming pools they lounged by under the stars, Barbie and Ken could never make love? No matter how much sexuality Barbie possessed, she would never turn Ken on. He would be forever withholding, forever detached. There was a loneliness about Barbie's situation that was always disturbing. And twenty-five years later, movies and videos are still filled with topless women and covered men. As if we're all trapped in Barbie's world and can never escape.

### Journal Writing

While growing up, did you play with Barbie or another kind of doll—for instance, baby dolls, action figures like GI Joe, figures based on cartoon or movie characters? In your journal, describe your relationship with such toys, or explain why you never played with them. (To take your journal writing further, see “From Journal to Essay” on the facing page.)

### Questions on Meaning

1. Why does Prager say that “suddenly a lot of things made sense” when she discovered that Barbie was designed by a man? Is she referring here only to Barbie's looks?
2. Are we supposed to believe the claims that Prager makes in paragraph 4? What is the point she is trying to make?
3. What is Prager's **DEFINITION** of a *feminist* in this essay? Where do you find this definition?
4. What is Prager's **THESIS**?

### Questions on Writing Strategy

1. What elements of Barbie does Prager's analysis identify? What new picture of the doll does Prager arrive at as a result?
2. Prager refers to four famous women by name. What does each reference suggest? What is the **EFFECT** of her using these famous names?
3. Prager poses several **RHETORICAL QUESTIONS**, such as “Could this account for the popularity of breast implant surgery?” (par. 3), “Or is Barbie the dream date of

weapons designers?” (5), and “Why [. . .] was Barbie designed with such obvious sexual equipment and Ken not?” (7). What is the **PURPOSE** of these rhetorical questions?

4. **OTHER METHODS.** In her last paragraph Prager **COMPARES AND CONTRASTS** the ways the toy company depicted the sexuality of Barbie and Ken. What are the differences? What ideas of **CAUSE AND EFFECT** emerge from this comparison?

### Questions on Language

1. Prager notes that Barbie is a product of a time when “small breasts were king” (par. 5). What is the significance of the word *king* in this context?
2. Why does Prager call Barbie “masculine” in paragraph 5? Does this description contradict Prager's view of Barbie as an unattainable and inappropriate feminine ideal?
3. Prager describes dolls' boyfriends before Barbie's Ken as “figments with large portfolios and three-piece suits and presidential aspirations” (par. 6). What are the **CONNOTATIONS** of this description?
4. Consult your dictionary if any of the following words are unfamiliar: eclectic (par. 1); ameliorate, subliminally, epitome (3); phallic (5); totemic, ineffably, jodhpurs (6); humongous, truncated (7).

### Suggestions for Writing

1. **FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY.** Drawing on your journal entry (facing page) and using your own experiences as **EVIDENCE**, write an essay that explains the influence of a particular doll or of dolls in general. Your essay may be serious or humorous, but it should include plenty of description and focus on cause and effect.
2. Prager asserts that knowing a man designed Barbie *explains* a lot of problems she always had with Barbie, but it does not *excuse* or *solve* the problems. What new knowledge can you think of that provided a reasonable explanation for a personal problem, while doing nothing to repair the situation? For instance, did you come to understand why your taxes or your rent increased, why you received a disappointing grade in a course, why someone dislikes you, or why a friend is depressed? In an essay, explain the situation, what you now understand about it, and finally, what it would take, in addition to the new information, to solve the problem.
3. **CRITICAL WRITING.** In paragraph 6 Prager suggests, with a tinge of **IRONY**, several ways to think of Barbie as contributing to the liberation rather than the oppression of women. What do you think of Barbie as a role model for girls? Write an essay supporting or refuting Prager's thesis. (If you haven't seen a Barbie doll in a while, you might visit a toy store or borrow a child's.) Is Barbie damaging, as Prager maintains, or liberating, or neither?
4. **CONNECTIONS.** Both Prager and Armin A. Brott, in “Not All Men Are Sly Foxes” (p. 276), examine cultural artifacts that could influence children's ideas of their own and the opposite sex. Consider a cultural artifact that affected you as a child, such as a television show, book, movie, toy, sport, or kind of music. (It may have influenced your views of sex roles but could also have influenced you in

## ADDITIONAL WRITING TOPICS

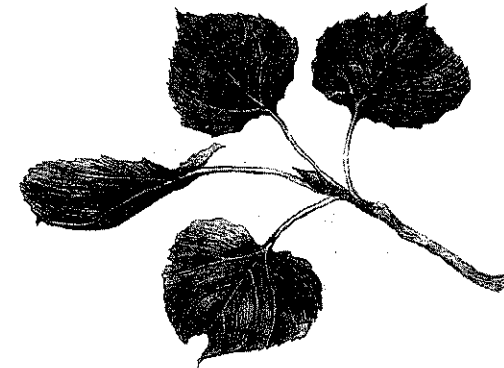
### *Division or Analysis*

Write an essay by the method of division or analysis using one of the following subjects (or choose your own subject). In your essay, make sure your purpose and your principle of division or analysis are clear to your readers. Explain the parts of your subject so that readers know how each relates to the others and contributes to the whole.

1. The slang or technical terminology of a group such as stand-up comedians or computer hackers
2. An especially bad movie, television show, or book
3. A doll, game, or other toy from childhood
4. A typical TV commercial for a product such as laundry soap, deodorant, beer, or a luxury or economy car
5. An appliance or machine, such as a stereo speaker, a motorcycle, a microwave oven, or a camera
6. An organization or association, such as a social club, a sports league, or a support group
7. The characteristic appearance of a rock singer or a classical violinist
8. A year in the life of a student
9. Your favorite poem
10. A short story, essay, or other work that made you think
11. The government of your community
12. The most popular video store (or other place of business) in town
13. The Bible
14. A band or orchestra
15. A painting or statue

## CLASSIFICATION

### Sorting into Kinds



### THE METHOD

To CLASSIFY is to make sense of the world by arranging many units — trucks, chemical elements, wasps, students — into more manageable groups. Zoologists classify animals, botanists classify plants — and their classifications help us to understand a vast and complex subject: life on earth. To help us find books in a library, librarians classify books into categories: fiction, biography, history, psychology, and so forth. For the convenience of readers, newspapers run classified advertising, grouping many small ads into categories such as Help Wanted and Cars for Sale.

### Subjects and Reasons for Classification

The subject of a classification is always a number of things, such as peaches or political systems. (In contrast, DIVISION or ANALYSIS, the topic of the preceding chapter, usually deals with a solitary subject, a coherent whole, such as a peach or a political system.) The job of classification is to sort the things into groups or classes based on their similarities and differences. Say, for instance, you're going to write an essay about how people write. After interviewing a lot of writers, you determine that writers' processes differ widely, mainly in the amount of planning

and rewriting they entail. (Notice that this determination involves analyzing the process of writing, separating it into steps. See Chap. 5.) On the basis of your findings, you create groups for planners, one-drafters, and rewriters. Once your groups are defined (and assuming they are valid), your subjects (the writers) almost sort themselves out.

Classification is done for a PURPOSE. In a New York City guidebook, Joan Hamburg and Norma Ketay discuss low-priced hotels. (Notice that already they are examining the members of a group: low-priced as opposed to medium- and high-priced hotels.) They cast the low-priced hotels into categories: Rooms for Singles and Students, Rooms for Families, Rooms for Servicepeople, and Rooms for General Occupancy. Always their purpose is evident: to match up the visitor with a suitable kind of room. When a classification has no purpose, it seems a silly and hollow exercise.

Just as you can ANALYZE a subject (or divide a pie) in many ways, you can classify a subject according to many principles. A different New York guidebook might classify all hotels according to price: grand luxury, luxury, commercial, low-priced (Hamburg and Ketay's category), fleabag, and flophouse. The purpose of this classification would be to match visitors to hotels fitting their pocketbooks. The principle you use in classifying things depends on your purpose. A linguist might explain the languages of the world by classifying them according to their origins (Romance languages, Germanic languages, Coptic languages...), but a student battling with a college language requirement might try to entertain fellow students by classifying languages into three groups: hard to learn, harder to learn, and unlearnable.

### Kinds of Classification

The simplest classification is binary (or two-part), in which you sort things out into (1) those with a certain distinguishing feature and (2) those without it. You might classify a number of persons, let's say, into smokers and nonsmokers, heavy metal fans and nonfans, runners and nonrunners, believers and nonbelievers. Binary classification is most useful when your subject is easily divisible into positive and negative categories.

Classification can be complex as well. As Jonathan Swift reminds us,

So, naturalists observe, a flea  
Hath smaller fleas that on him prey,  
And these have smaller yet to bite 'em.  
And so proceed *ad infinitum*.

In being faithful to reality, you will sometimes find that you have to sort out the members of categories into subcategories. Hamburg and Ketay

did something of the kind when they subclassified the class of low-priced New York hotels. Writing about the varieties of one Germanic language, such as English, a writer could identify the subclasses of British English, North American English, Australian English, and so on.

As readers, we all enjoy watching a clever writer sort things into categories. We like to meet classifications that strike us as true and familiar. This pleasure may account for the appeal of magazine articles that classify things ("The Seven Common Garden Varieties of Moocher," "Five Embarrassing Types of Social Blunder"). Usefulness as well as pleasure may explain the popularity of classifications that EVALUATE things. In a survey of current movies, a newspaper critic might classify the films into categories: "Don't Miss," "Worth Seeing," "So-So," and "Never Mind." The magazine *Consumer Reports* uses this method of classifying in its comments on different brands of stereo speakers or canned tuna. Products are sorted into groups (excellent, good, fair, poor, and not acceptable), and the merits of each are discussed by the method of description. (Of a frozen pot pie: "Bottom crust gummy, meat spongy when chewed, with nondescript old-poultry and stale-flour flavor.")

## THE PROCESS

### Purposes and Theses

Classification will usually come into play when you want to impose order on a complex subject that includes many items. In one essay in this chapter, for instance, Deborah Tannen tackles miscommunications among working men and women. Sometimes you may use classification humorously, as Russell Baker does in another essay in this chapter, to give a charge to familiar experiences. Whichever use you make of classification, though, do it for a reason. The files of composition instructors are littered with student essays in which nothing was ventured and nothing gained by classification.

Things can be classified into categories that reveal truth, or into categories that don't tell us a thing. To sort out ten U.S. cities according to their relative freedom from air pollution or their cost of living or the degree of progress they have made in civil rights might prove highly informative and useful. Such a classification might even tell us where we'd want to live. But to sort out the cities according to a superficial feature such as the relative size of their cat and dog populations wouldn't interest anyone, probably, except a veterinarian looking for a job.

Your purpose, your THESIS, and your principle of classification will all overlap at the point where you find your interest in your subject. Say you're curious about how other students write. Is your interest primarily in the materials they use (word processor, typewriter, pencil), in

where and when they write, or in how much planning and rewriting they do? Any of these could lead to a principle for sorting the students into groups. And that principle should be revealed in your **THESIS SENTENCE** (or sentences), letting readers know why you are classifying. Here, from the essays in this chapter, are two examples of classification thesis sentences:

Inanimate objects are classified into three major categories—those that don't work, those that break down and those that get lost. (Russell Baker, "The Plot Against People")

Unfortunately, women and men often have different ideas about what's appropriate [in conversation], different ways of speaking. Many of the conversational rituals common among women are designed to take the other person's feelings into account, while many of the conversational rituals common among men are designed to maintain the one-up position, or at least avoid appearing one-down. (Deborah Tannen, "But What Do You Mean?")

### Categories

For a workable classification, make sure that the categories you choose don't overlap. If you were writing a survey of popular magazines for adults and you were sorting your subject into categories that included women's magazines and sports magazines, you might soon run into trouble. Into which category would you place *Women's Sports*? The trouble is that both categories take in the same item. To avoid this problem, you'll need to reorganize your classification on a different principle. You might sort out the magazines by their audiences: magazines mainly for women, magazines mainly for men, magazines for both women and men. Or you might group them according to subject matter: sports magazines, literary magazines, astrology magazines, fashion magazines, TV fan magazines, trade journals, and so on. *Women's Sports* would fit into either of those classification schemes, but into only one category in each scheme.

When you draw up a scheme of classification, be sure also that you include all essential categories. Omitting an important category can weaken the effect of your essay, no matter how well written it is. It would be a major oversight, for example, if you were to classify the residents of a dormitory according to their religious affiliations and not include a category for the numerous nonaffiliated. Your reader might wonder if your sloppiness in forgetting a category extended to your thinking about the topic as well.

Some form of outline can be helpful to keep the classes and their members straight as you develop and draft ideas. You might experiment with a diagram in which you jot down headings for the groups, with

plenty of space around them, and then let each heading accumulate members as you think of them, the way a magnet attracts paperclips. This kind of diagram offers more flexibility than a vertical list or outline, and it may be a better aid for keeping categories from overlapping or disappearing.

### CHECKLIST FOR REVISING A CLASSIFICATION

- ✓ **PURPOSE.** Have you classified for a reason? Will readers see why you bothered?
- ✓ **PRINCIPLE OF CLASSIFICATION.** Will readers also see what rule or principle you have used for sorting individuals into groups? Is this principle apparent in your thesis sentence?
- ✓ **CONSISTENCY.** Does each representative of your subject fall into one category only, so that categories don't overlap?
- ✓ **COMPLETENESS.** Have you mentioned all the essential categories suggested by your principle of classification?
- ✓ **EVIDENCE.** Have you provided enough examples for each category so that readers can clearly distinguish one from another?

### CLASSIFICATION IN A PARAGRAPH: TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

#### Using Classification to Write About Television

Written for *The Brief Bedford Reader*, the following paragraph uses classification to explain how a TV comedy's taped laugh track combines various laughs to sound like an actual rib-tickled audience. With the related paragraph on page 226, which **ANALYZES** the elements of any particular kind of laugh, this paragraph could be part of a full behind-the-scenes essay on how TV comedies make us laugh, even despite ourselves.

Most canned laughs produced by laugh machines fall into one of five reliable sounds. There are *titters*, light vocal laughs with which an imaginary audience responds to a comedian's least wriggle or grimace. Some producers rely heavily on *chuckles*, deeper, more chesty responses. Most profound of all, *belly laughs* are summoned to acclaim broader jokes and sexual innuendos. When provided at full level of sound and in longest duration, the belly laugh becomes the Big Boffola. There are also *wild howls* or *screamers*, extreme responses used not more than three times per show, lest they seem fake. These are crowd laughs, and yet the machine also offers

Thesis sentence names  
principle of classification

Categories:

1. Titters

2. Chuckles

3. Belly laughs

4. Wild howls or  
screamers

## CASE STUDY

### Using Classification

The summer between his sophomore and junior years of college, Kharron Reid was seeking an internship in computer networking. After seeing several likely openings posted at his school's placement office, he began compiling a résumé that would make him appealing to potential employers.

Part of Reid's challenge in drafting his résumé was to bring order to what seemed a complex and unwieldy subject, his life. The main solution was to classify his activities and interests into clearly defined groups, such as work experience, education, and special skills. Classification wasn't a conscious choice for Reid: He didn't think, "I must classify." Instead, he recognized from advice he'd seen on résumé writing that some sorting was required.

In his first draft, Reid worked to emphasize his qualifications for the internship he sought. The group that gave him the most trouble was work experience: Should he list his jobs with the specifics of each one? Or should he further sort his work experience into skills (such as computer skills, administrative skills, and communication skills) and then list the specifics of his jobs under each subcategory? He tried the résumé both ways and finally opted for the former arrangement, which seemed more straightforward, potentially less confusing to readers.

Before he could prepare his final draft, Reid also needed to decide which to put first, the category of education or the category of work experience. Here, he decided on work experience first because it was directly related to the internships he now sought; his education was more broad based.

Reid's final résumé appears on the facing page. For the cover letter he wrote to go with the résumé, see page 161.

**Kharron Reid**  
137 Chester Street, Apt. E  
Allston, MA 02134  
(617) 555-4009  
kreid@bu.edu

## OBJECTIVE

An internship that offers experience in information systems

## EXPERIENCE

*Pioneer Networking*, Damani, MI, May–September 1998

- As an intern, worked as a LAN specialist using a Unix-based server
- Connected eight workstations onto a LAN by laying physical platform and configuring software
- Assisted Network Engineer in monitoring operations of LAN

*NBS Systems Corp.*, Denniston, MI, June–September 1997

- As an intern, helped install seven WANs using Windows NT Workstation
- Planned layout for WANs
- Installed physical platform and configured servers

## SPECIAL SKILLS

Computer proficiency:

Windows 98/XP	QuarkXPress	HTML
Windows NT/2000	Adobe Photoshop and	XML
Unix	Pagemaker	JavaScript
Linux	CorelDRAW	

Internet research

## INTERESTS

Building computers, designing Web sites, wrestling

## EDUCATION

*Boston University, School of Management*, 1997 to present

Current standing: sophomore  
Double major: business administration and information systems  
Courses: introductory and advanced programming, information systems 1 and 2, basic business courses

*Lahser High School*, Bloomfield Hills, MI, 1993–1997

Graduated with academic, college-preparatory degree

## REFERENCES

Available on request from Office of Career Services, Boston University,  
19 Deerfield Street, Boston, MA 02215

## RUSSELL BAKER

RUSSELL BAKER is one of America's notable humorists and political satirists. Born in 1925 in Virginia, Baker was raised in New Jersey and Maryland by his widowed mother. After serving in the navy during World War II, he earned a BA from Johns Hopkins University in 1947. He became a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* that year and then joined the *New York Times* in 1954, covering the State Department, the White House, and Congress. From 1962 until his retirement from the *Times* in 1998, he wrote a popular column that ranged over the merely bothersome (unreadable menus) and the serious (the Cold War). Baker has twice received the Pulitzer Prize, once for distinguished commentary and again for the first volume of his autobiography, *Growing Up* (1982). The most recent addition to the autobiography is *Looking Back* (2002). Many of Baker's columns have been collected in books, most recently *There's a Country in My Cellar* (1990). Baker has also written fiction and children's books and edited *Russell Baker's Book of American Humor* (1993). In 1993 he began his television career as host of PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre*.

### *The Plot Against People*

The critic R. Z. Sheppard has commented that Baker can "best be appreciated for doing what a good humorist has always done: writing to preserve his sanity for at least one more day." In this piece from the *New York Times* in 1968, Baker uses classification for that purpose, taking aim, as he has often done, at things.

Inanimate objects are classified into three major categories—those that don't work, those that break down and those that get lost.

The goal of all inanimate objects is to resist man and ultimately to defeat him, and the three major classifications are based on the method each object uses to achieve its purpose. As a general rule, any object capable of breaking down at the moment when it is most needed will do so. The automobile is typical of the category.

With the cunning typical of its breed, the automobile never breaks down while entering a filling station with a large staff of idle mechanics. It waits until it reaches a downtown intersection in the middle of the rush hour, or until it is fully loaded with family and luggage on the Ohio Turnpike.

Thus it creates maximum misery, inconvenience, frustration and irritability among its human cargo, thereby reducing its owner's life span.

Washing machines, garbage disposals, lawn mowers, light bulbs, automatic laundry dryers, water pipes, furnaces, electrical fuses, television tubes, hose nozzles, tape recorders, slide projectors—all are in league with the auto-

mobile to take their turn at breaking down whenever life threatens to flow smoothly for their human enemies.

Many inanimate objects, of course, find it extremely difficult to break down. Pliers, for example, and gloves and keys are almost totally incapable of breaking down. Therefore, they have had to evolve a different technique for resisting man.

They get lost. Science has still not solved the mystery of how they do it, and no man has ever caught one of them in the act of getting lost. The most plausible theory is that they have developed a secret method of locomotion which they are able to conceal the instant a human eye falls upon them.

It is not uncommon for a pair of pliers to climb all the way from the cellar to the attic in its single-minded determination to raise its owner's blood pressure. Keys have been known to burrow three feet under mattresses. Women's purses, despite their great weight, frequently travel through six or seven rooms to find hiding space under a couch.

Scientists have been struck by the fact that things that break down virtually never get lost, while things that get lost hardly ever break down.

A furnace, for example, will invariably break down at the depth of the first winter cold wave, but it will never get lost. A woman's purse, which after all does have some inherent capacity for breaking down, hardly ever does; it almost invariably chooses to get lost.

Some persons believe this constitutes evidence that inanimate objects are not entirely hostile to man, and that a negotiated peace is possible. After all, they point out, a furnace could infuriate a man even more thoroughly by getting lost than by breaking down, just as a glove could upset him far more by breaking down than by getting lost.

Not everyone agrees, however, that this indicates a conciliatory attitude among inanimate objects. Many say it merely proves that furnaces, gloves and pliers are incredibly stupid.

The third class of objects—those that don't work—is the most curious of all. These include such objects as barometers, car clocks, cigarette lighters, flashlights and toy-train locomotives. It is inaccurate, of course, to say that they never work. They work once, usually for the first few hours after being brought home, and then quit. Thereafter, they never work again.

In fact, it is widely assumed that they are built for the purpose of not working. Some people have reached advanced ages without ever seeing some of these objects—barometers, for example—in working order.

Science is utterly baffled by the entire category. There are many theories about it. The most interesting holds that the things that don't work have attained the highest state possible for an inanimate object, the state to which things that break down and things that get lost can still only aspire.

They have truly defeated man by conditioning him never to expect anything of them, and in return they have given man the only peace he receives from inanimate society. He does not expect his barometer to work, his electric locomotive to run, his cigarette lighter to light or his flashlight to illuminate, and when they don't it does not raise his blood pressure. 16

He cannot attain that peace with furnaces and keys and cars and women's purses as long as he demands that they work for their keep. 17

### Journal Writing

What other ways can you think of to classify inanimate objects? In your journal, try expanding on Baker's categories, or create new categories of your own based on a different principle—for example, objects no student can live without or objects no student would want to be caught dead with. (To take your journal writing further, see "From Journal to Essay" on the facing page.)

### Questions on Meaning

1. What is Baker's **THESIS**?
2. Why don't things that break down get lost, and vice versa?
3. Does Baker have any **PURPOSE** other than to make his readers smile?
4. How have inanimate objects "defeated man"?

### Questions on Writing Strategy

1. What is the **EFFECT** of Baker's principle of classification? What categories are omitted here, and why?
2. Find three places where Baker uses hyperbole. (See *Figures of speech* in Useful Terms if you need a definition.) What is the **EFFECT** of the hyperbole?
3. How does the essay's **INTRODUCTION** help set its **TONE**? How does the **CONCLUSION** reinforce the tone?
4. **OTHER METHODS.** How does Baker use **NARRATION** to portray inanimate objects in the act of "resisting" people? Discuss how these mini-narratives make his classification more persuasive.

### Questions on Language

1. Look up any of these words that are unfamiliar: plausible, locomotion (par. 7); invariably, inherent (10); conciliatory (12).
2. What are the **CONNOTATIONS** of the word "cunning" (par. 3)? What is its effect in this context?

3. Why does Baker use such expressions as "man," "some people," and "their human enemies" rather than *I* to describe those who come into conflict with inanimate objects? How might the essay have been different if Baker had relied on *I*?

### Suggestions for Writing

1. **FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY.** Write a brief, humorous essay based on one classification system from your journal entry (facing page). It may be helpful to use narration or **DESCRIPTION** in your classification. **FIGURES OF SPEECH**, especially hyperbole and understatement, can help you to establish a comic tone.
2. Think of a topic that would not generally be considered appropriate for a serious classification (some examples: game-show winners, body odors, stupid pet tricks, knock-knock jokes). Select a principle of classification and write a brief essay sorting the subject into categories. You may want to use a humorous tone; then again, you may want to approach the topic "seriously," counting on the contrast between subject and treatment to make your **IRONY** clear.
3. **CRITICAL WRITING.** In a short essay, discuss the likely **AUDIENCE** for "The Plot Against People." (Recall that it was first published in the *New York Times*.) What can you **INFER** from his **EXAMPLES** about Baker's own age and economic status? Does he **ASSUME** his audience is similar? How do the connections between author and audience help establish the essay's humor? Could this humor be seen as excluding some readers?
4. **CONNECTIONS.** Baker adopts a mock-serious tone here, one that pretends to almost scientific precision. How does Baker's tone **COMPARE** with the tone Horace Miner adopts in "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema" (p. 252)? What similarities and differences can you detect in each writer's **STYLE** of presentation? How do you think each writer's sense of his intended audience affected this style?

### Russell Baker on Writing

In "Computer Fallout," an essay from the October 11, 1987, *New York Times Magazine*, Baker sets out to prove that computers make a writer's life easier, but he ends up somewhere else entirely. The skillful way he takes us along with him is what makes the journey enjoyable—and perhaps familiar.

The wonderful thing about writing with a computer instead of a typewriter or a lead pencil is that it's so easy to rewrite that you can make each sentence almost perfect before moving on to the next sentence.

An impressive aspect of using a computer to write with

One of the plusses about a computer on which to write

Happily, the computer is a marked improvement over both the typewriter and the lead pencil for purposes of literary composition, due to the ease with which rewriting can be effectuated, thus enabling

## STEPHEN KING

A prolific and hugely popular master of horror and dread, STEPHEN KING has written more than thirty books in the twenty-plus years he has been publishing. He was born in Portland, Maine, in 1947 and grew up in Indiana, Connecticut, and Maine, where he has lived for most of his adult life. He graduated in 1970 from the University of Maine at Orono, worked in an industrial laundry, and taught high-school English before the sales of his books allowed him to write full-time. Among King's best-known novels are *Carrie* (1974), *The Shining* (1977), *The Dead Zone* (1979), *Misery* (1987), and *Dolores Claiborne* (1992)—all of them also made into movies. His own screenplays include *Creepshow* (1982) and *Pet Sematary* (1987, from the 1985 novel). King has also published several books under the pen name Richard Bachman, most recently *The Regulators* (1996). His latest projects under his own name are the novels *Dreamcatcher* and *Black House* (both 2001), the story collection *Everything's Eventual* (2002), and the nonfiction book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000).

### "Ever Et Raw Meat?"

King's books have sold nearly 100 million copies, and his readers are naturally curious about him. In this essay published in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1987, King reveals that he finds the public's interest sometimes gratifying, sometimes annoying, and sometimes very funny.

It seems to me that, in the minds of readers, writers actually exist to serve two purposes, and the more important may not be the writing of books and stories. The primary function of writers, it seems, is to answer readers' questions. These fall into three categories. The third is the one that fascinates me most, but I'll identify the other two first.

#### The One-of-a-Kind Questions

Each day's mail brings a few of these. Often they reflect the writer's field of interest—history, horror, romance, the American West, outer space, big business. The only thing they have in common is their uniqueness. Novelists are frequently asked where they get their ideas (see category No. 2), but writers must wonder where this relentless curiosity, these really strange questions, come from.

There was, for instance, the young woman who wrote to me from a penal institution in Minnesota. She informed me she was a kleptomaniac. She further informed me that I was her favorite writer, and she had stolen every one

of my books she could get her hands on. "But after I stole *Different Seasons* from the library and read it, I felt moved to send it back," she wrote. "Do you think this means you wrote this one the best?" After due consideration, I decided that reform on the part of the reader has nothing to do with artistic merit. I came close to writing back to find out if she had stolen *Misery* yet but decided I ought to just keep my mouth shut.

From Bill V. in North Carolina: "I see you have a beard. Are you morbid of razors?"

From Carol K. in Hawaii: "Will you soon write of pimples or some other facial blemish?"

From Don G., no address (and a blurry postmark): "Why do you keep up this disgusting mother worship when anyone with any sense knows a MAN has no use to his mother once he is weaned?"

From Raymond R. in Mississippi: "Ever et raw meat?" (It's the laconic ones like this that really get me.)

I have been asked if I beat my children and/or my wife. I have been asked to parties in places I have never been and hope never to go. I was once asked to give away the bride at a wedding, and one young woman sent me an ounce of pot, with the attached question: "This is where I get my inspiration—where do you get yours?" Actually, mine usually comes in envelopes—the kind through which you can view your name and address printed by a computer—that arrive at the end of every month.

My favorite question of this type, from Anchorage, asked simply: "How could you write such a why?" Unsigned. If E. E. Cummings<sup>1</sup> were still alive, I'd try to find out if he'd moved to the Big North.

#### The Old Standards

These are the questions writers dream of answering when they are collecting rejection slips, and the ones they tire of quickest once they start to publish. In other words, they are the questions that come up without fail in every dull interview the writer has ever given or will ever give. I'll enumerate a few of them:

Where do you get your ideas? (I get mine in Utica.)

How do you get an agent? (Sell your soul to the Devil.)

Do you have to know somebody to get published? (Yes; in fact, it helps to grovel, toady, and be willing to perform twisted acts of sexual depravity at a moment's notice, and in public if necessary.)

<sup>1</sup>E. E. Cummings (1894–1962) was an American poet noted for wordplay like that in the question King quotes. —EDS.



- How do you start a novel? (I usually start by writing the number 1 in the upper right-hand corner of a clean sheet of paper.) 14
- How do you write best sellers? (Same way you get an agent.) 15
- How do you sell your book to the movies? (Tell them they don't want it.) 16
- What time of day do you write? (It doesn't matter; if I don't keep busy enough, the time inevitably comes.) 17
- Do you ever run out of ideas? (Does a bear defecate in the woods?) 18
- Who is your favorite writer? (Anyone who writes stories I would have written had I thought of them first.) 19
- There are others, but they're pretty boring, so let us march on. 20

### The Real Weirdies

Here I am, bopping down the street, on my morning walk, when some guy pulls over in his pickup truck or just happens to walk by and says, "Hi, Steve! Writing any good books lately?" I have an answer for this; I've developed it over the years out of pure necessity. I say, "I'm taking some time off." I say that even if I'm working like mad, thundering down homestretch on a book. The reason *why* I say this is because no other answer seems to fit. Believe me, I know. In the course of the trial and error that has finally resulted in "I'm taking some time off," I have discarded about 500 other answers. 21

Having an answer for "You writing any good books lately?" is a good thing, but I'd be lying if I said it solves the problem of *what the question means*. It is this inability on my part to make sense of this odd query, which reminds me of that Zen riddle—"Why is a mouse when it runs?"—that leaves me feeling mentally shaken and impotent. You see, it isn't just *one* question; it is a *bundle* of questions, cunningly wrapped up in one package. It's like that old favorite, "Are you still beating your wife?" 22

If I answer in the affirmative, it means I may have written—how many books? two? four?—(all of them good) in the last—how long? Well, how long is "lately"? It could mean I wrote maybe three good books just last week, or maybe two *on this very walk up to Bangor International Airport and back!* On the other hand, if I say no, what does *that* mean? I wrote three or four *bad* books in the last "lately" (surely "lately" can be no longer than a month, six weeks at the outside)? 23

Or here I am, signing books at the Betts' Bookstore or B. Dalton's in the local consumer factory (nicknamed "the mall"). This is something I do twice a year, and it serves much the same purpose as those little bundles of twigs religious people in the Middle Ages used to braid into whips and flagellate themselves with. During the course of this exercise in madness and self-abnegation, at least a dozen people will approach the little coffee table where 24

I sit behind a barrier of books and ask brightly, "Don't you wish you had a rubber stamp?"

I have an answer to this one, too, an answer that has been developed over the years in a trial-and-error method similar to "I'm taking some time off." The answer to the rubber stamp question is: "No, I don't mind." 25

Never mind if I really do or don't (this time it's my own motivations I want to skip over, you'll notice); the question is, Why does such an illogical query occur to so many people? My signature is actually stamped on the covers of several of my books, but people seem just as eager to get these signed as those that aren't so stamped. Would these questioners stand in line for the privilege of watching me slam a rubber stamp down on the title page of *The Shining* or *Pet Sematary*? I don't think they would. 26

If you still don't sense something peculiar in these questions, this one might help convince you. I'm sitting in the cafe around the corner from my house, grabbing a little lunch by myself and reading a book (reading at the table is one of the few bad habits acquired in my youth that I have nobly resisted giving up) until a customer or maybe even a waitress sidles up and asks, "How come you're not reading one of your own books?" 27

This hasn't happened just once, or even occasionally; it happens *a lot*. The computer-generated answer to this question usually gains a chuckle, although it is nothing but the pure, logical and apparent truth. "I know how they all come out," I say. End of exchange. Back to lunch, with only a pause to wonder why people assume you want to read what you wrote, rewrote, read again following the obligatory editorial conference and yet again during the process of correcting the mistakes that a good copyeditor always prods, screaming, from their hiding places (I once heard a crime writer suggest that God could have used a copyeditor, and while I find the notion slightly blasphemous, I tend to agree). 28

And then people sometimes ask in that chatty, let's-strike-up-a-conversation way people have, "How long does it take you to write a book?" Perfectly reasonable question—at least until you try to answer it and discover there is no answer. This time the computer-generated answer is a total falsehood, but it at least serves the purpose of advancing the conversation to some more discussable topic. "Usually about nine months," I say, "the same length of time it takes to make a baby." This satisfies everyone but me. I know that nine months is just an average, and probably a completely fictional one at that. It ignores *The Running Man* (published under the name Richard Bachman), which was written in four days during a snowy February vacation when I was teaching high school. It also ignores *It* and my latest, *The Tommyknockers*. It is over 1,000 pages long and took four years to write. *The Tommyknockers* is 400 pages shorter but took five years to write. 29

Do I mind these questions? Yes . . . and no. Anyone minds questions that have no real answers and thus expose the fellow being questioned to be not a real doctor but a sort of witch doctor. But no one—at least no one with a modicum of simple human kindness—resents questions from people who honestly want answers. And now and then someone will ask a really interesting question, like, Do you write in the nude? The answer—not generated by computer—is: I don't think I ever have, but if it works, I'm willing to try it.

### Journal Writing

Do you sympathize with King's attitude toward the questions he is asked by fans? What are some questions you have been asked that you found either unanswerable or unbearably tedious? Were they asked when you were in school or on a job? by younger or older relatives? by an acquaintance who drove you crazy? by people you were meeting for the first time? Write down as many such questions as you can think of. (To take your journal writing further, see "From Journal to Essay" on the facing page.)

### Questions on Meaning

1. What is the **THESIS** of this essay? Why do you think King wrote it: to entertain readers? to gain sympathy for himself? to discourage readers from writing to him? some other reason? Explain your answer.
2. What is so "peculiar" about the questions King calls the "real weirdies" (pars. 21–29)?
3. In paragraph 24 King draws a comparison between his signing of books and the self-flagellation (self-whipping) by people in the Middle Ages. What does he mean by this **ANALOGY**?

### Questions on Writing Strategy

1. How does King distinguish the types of questions in the three categories of his classification? What, specifically, sets the questions in each category apart from those in the other two?
2. What is King's relationship with his **AUDIENCE** in this essay? How do you know? Recall that he wrote the essay for the *New York Times Book Review* and so could expect a well-educated and well-read audience.
3. How does King's concluding paragraph modify his response to readers' questions?
4. **OTHER METHODS.** How do King's many **EXAMPLES** work to illustrate his **GENERALIZATION** that the "primary function of writers, it seems, is to answer readers' questions" (par. 1)? What do all the examples have in common?

### Questions on Language

1. Make sure you know the meanings of the following words: kleptomaniac (par. 3); morbid (4); weaned (6); laconic (7); enumerate (10); grovel, depravity (13); defecate (18); impotent (22); affirmative (23); self-abnegation (24); sidles (27); obligatory, blasphemous (28); modicum (30).
2. King directly addresses his readers at certain points—for instance, "Believe me" (par. 21), "You see" (22), "you'll notice" (26), and "If you still don't sense something peculiar" (27). Why do you think he addresses readers? What is the **EFFECT**?
3. In paragraphs 28–30 King mentions the "computer-generated answer" to some of the questions he has been asked. What does he mean by this metaphor? (See *Figures of speech* in *Useful Terms* for a definition of *metaphor*.)

### Suggestions for Writing

1. **FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY.** Develop your journal entry (previous page) into an essay in which you classify the questions you've been asked according to some clear principle—for instance, whether the questions are obvious, obscure, or off-the-wall; whether they are more often asked by men, women, or children; or whether they are innocent, prying, or simply rude. Like King, try to give each category an identifying label.
2. Teachers often tell us that the only stupid question is the one we don't ask. But King seems to think there are lots of stupid questions that unfortunately *do* get asked. Is there such a thing as a stupid question? How do you identify one?
3. **CRITICAL WRITING.** One might reasonably claim that those who are famous owe something to the fans who made them popular. Write an essay on this claim, using King as an extended example. Does King have an obligation to his fans? If so, does he live up to it? Use his work as **EVIDENCE** for your answers, including his fiction as well as "Ever Et Raw Meat?"
4. **CONNECTIONS.** Stephanie Ericsson, in "The Ways We Lie" (p. 317), suggests that lies can help us maintain a sense of being connected to others in good ways. King implies that questions to famous writers may do the same. After reading Ericsson's essay, write an essay of your own that examines how lies and questions may work as social glue. Consider all possible positions—lying versus being lied to, asking questions versus answering them. Is the sense of connection one-sided? Why, or why not?

## Stephen King on Writing

The impressive publishing record of Stephen King depends on his regular writing habits. In 1992 he told W. C. Stoby of *Writer's Digest* that he works "four, four-and-a-half hours a day, seven days a week." It may be surprising, then, that King faces the same demons of procrastination that most of us do.

## ADDITIONAL WRITING TOPICS

### *Classification*

Write an essay by the method of classification, in which you sort one of the following subjects into categories of your own. Make clear your PURPOSE in classifying and the basis of your classification. Explain each class with DEFINITIONS and EXAMPLES (you may find it helpful to make up a name for each group). Check your classes to be sure they neither gap nor overlap.

1. Commuters, or people who use public transportation
2. Environmental problems or environmental solutions
3. Web sites
4. Vegetarians
5. Talk shows
6. The ills or benefits of city life
7. The recordings you own
8. Families
9. Stand-up comedians
10. Present-day styles of marriage
11. Vacations
12. College students today
13. Movies for teenagers or men or women
14. Waiters you'd never tip
15. Comic strips
16. Movie monsters
17. Sports announcers
18. Inconsiderate people
19. Radio stations
20. Mall millers (people who mill around malls)

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## ADDITIONAL WRITING TOPICS

### *Division or Analysis*

Write an essay by the method of division or analysis using one of the following subjects (or choose your own subject). In your essay, make sure your purpose and your principle of division or analysis are clear to your readers. Explain the parts of your subject so that readers know how each relates to the others and contributes to the whole.

1. The slang or technical terminology of a group such as stand-up comedians or computer hackers
2. An especially bad movie, television show, or book
3. A doll, game, or other toy from childhood
4. A typical TV commercial for a product such as laundry soap, deodorant, beer, or a luxury or economy car
5. An appliance or machine, such as a stereo speaker, a motorcycle, a microwave oven, or a camera
6. An organization or association, such as a social club, a sports league, or a support group
7. The characteristic appearance of a rock singer or a classical violinist
8. A year in the life of a student
9. Your favorite poem
10. A short story, an essay, or another work that made you think
11. The government of your community
12. The most popular video store (or other place of business) in town
13. The Bible
14. A band or an orchestra
15. A painting or statue